

Road beat: Tweaks enhance Sonata Eco



Sonata Eco continues to be a pleasurable ride.
Photos/Larry Weitzman

By Larry Weitzman

Introduced as a 2015 model in the summer of 2014, the new Sonata Eco differs from the standard Sonata in two basic ways. First, instead of the 2.4L normally aspirated Theta four-cylinder 185 hp engine it receives a small turbocharged 1.6L Gamma four-cylinder engine making 177 hp. Secondly, the ECO gets a trick seven-speed dual clutch tranny instead of the six-speed auto cog swapper that has a torque converter. Those are the main differences.

Sure there are other little tweaks here and there like outside mirror mounted turn signals, auto head lights, 10-way power with lumbar driver's seat and more, otherwise it is the same

great automobile.



Specifications

Price with destination
\$24,085 to \$28,310

Engine

Four cylinder inline 1.6L
turbo 16 valve 177 hp @
5,500 rpm

195 lb.-ft. of torque at
1,500-4,500 rpm

Transmission

Seven speed Dual Clutch
automatic with a manual mode

Configuration

Transverse mounted front
engine with front wheel
drive

Dimensions

Wheelbase 110.4 inches

Length 191.1 inches

Width 73.4 inches

Height 58.1 inches

Track (f/r) 63.5/63.5 inches

Ground clearance 5.3 inches

Cabin volume 106.1 cubic
feet

Trunk volume 16.3 cubic feet

Fuel Capacity 18.5 gallons

Weight 3,371 pounds
Steering lock to lock 2.78 turns
Turning circle 35.8 feet
Wheels 16X6.5 inch alloys
Tires 205/55X16
Co-efficient of drag 0.27

Performance

0-60 mph 7.16 seconds
50-70 mph 3.71 seconds
50-70 uphill 5.50 seconds
Top Speed Beyond sanity
Fuel economy EPA rated at 28/38/32 city/highway/combined.
Expect 32 mpg in suburban driving and 44 plus mpg on a level highway at 70 mph.

Of course its long wheelbase of 110 inches and length of 191 inches is identical to all other Sonatas; the difference is in the powertrain and what a surprising powertrain it is. Its 177 hp is achieved at a low 5,500 rpm and it belts out 195 pounds of twist from between 1,500 to 4,500 rpm from its 1.6L direct injected engine. It uses a twin scroll turbocharger to achieve this high level of performance and this is where it gets good.

In reviewing my recent test of a standard Sonata from about six months ago, it had good performance in the three performance tests of 0-60 mph, 50-70 mph and 50-70 mph uphill with numbers of 7.82 seconds, 4.25 seconds and 6.56 seconds respectively. However the tiny heart of the Eco produces bigger results with numbers of 7.16 seconds, 3.71 seconds and 5.50 seconds respectively, out running the 2.4L engine by over half a second in each category and a full second in the uphill climb. That is a significant difference. On top of that it returns EPA fuel economy over 10 percent better (EPA numbers

are 28/38/28 mpg city/highway/ combined vs. 24/35/24 mpg) than the standard 2.4L engine which incidentally has 8 more hp.

In real life the fuel economy difference on the highway is more like 15 percent at a steady 70 mph with a two-way run averaging 44 mpg versus 37 mpg. Overall the Eco averaged about 32 mpg versus 28 mpg and in a run from Placerville to South Lake Tahoe and back the Eco averaged 36.6 mpg in light traffic while averaging at least 55 mph. Also contributing to this performance is the extremely efficient and smooth seven-speed DCT tranny that responds with reflexes better than an NHL hockey goalie. Coefficient of drag is minuscule, wind cheating 0.27

Of the drawbacks, only two tiny ones are noticeable? First at idle I experienced a little bit of rough running and two, there is some turbo lag even with the more sophisticated twin scroll single turbo. But these are very minor issues and as demanding as I am with respect to automobile performance and economy, I would buy the Eco over the normally aspirated Sonata. The Eco even matches the 0-60 mph performance of the Sport 2.0T, but the Sport's 68 hp advantage was too big to overcome in passing tests where the Sport outperformed the Eco by the same margin that the Eco outperformed the standard Theta engine Sonata.

However, the Eco fuel economy is substantially better than the Sport, with the same Placerville to SLT and back run averaging 30.6 mpg and a highway average of about 35 mpg.

Handling is about the same as the standard Sonata although the standard wheels and tires are slightly smaller (16X6.5 inch alloys; 205/55X16 radial rubber). You won't notice any difference as the handling is nimble and the steering is very quick at 2.78 turns lock to lock. The all independent suspension is virtually identical to standard Sonata. But the ride quality seemed slightly quieter as did what noise factor there was. The engine is extremely smooth and quiet almost

turbine or electric like. The small engine only spins 2,050 rpm at 70 mph. Wind and road noise are nearly nonexistent, except for the coarsest roads.



Technology is at the driver's fingertips

Braking for the Eco is also almost identical to other Hyundai Sonatas with the identical four wheel disc setup. But perhaps the tire difference extended its 40 mph panic stop by about a foot to a still excellent 41 feet. Besides the ABS and other dynamic safety intervention electronics, there are a plethora of airbags, rear back up camera, cross traffic alert and more.

Inside is a luxurious interior. There is only one option package for the Eco and that is the \$4,100 Tech package which adds a blind spot warning system, leather and heated seats, NAV and really turns the Eco into a car wanting for nothing. The front chairs are sublime, the instrument package is complete. Everything, dash, doors, center console and most everything else is soft touch materials. Rear seating is huge as according to EPA Sonatas are classified as a large car. The trunk is a massive 16 cubic feet.

Compared to the super slick interior of the Sonata Sport, the Eco while not as stylish but is actually more comfortable.

Eco is a single priced car starting and ending at \$23,275 plus \$810 for the train from Montgomery, Alabama. The aforementioned Tech package is worth every penny of its \$4,100

and the Carpeted floor mats are \$125. That's it, \$28,310. This is the Sonata I would buy, great performance and outstanding fuel mileage plus a sublime ride. Throw in 100,000 mile warranty and a full tank of gas of 18.5 gallons you will love it when the trip computer show a remaining range of about 600 miles and as you cruise down the highway at 70 mph, the range gauge will actually go up. It's like making fuel.

Larry Weitzman has been into cars since he was 5 years old. At 8 he could recite from memory the hp of every car made in the U.S. He has put in thousands of laps on racetracks all over the Western United States.